

Urges Peake to Expand PTSD Efforts

Washington, DC- Today, Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) questioned the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), Lieutenant General James B. Peake and others at a hearing in Congress to address the suicide rates of our military veterans. In questioning Peake, Rodriguez urged the Secretary to support HR 2689, a bill Rodriguez has written specifically for troops with mental health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) issues that would expand health care and outreach opportunities for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, the bill sits before the full House Veterans Affairs Committee on which Rodriguez sits.

“We must reduced the stigma of PTSD so that veterans and returning service members seek treatment should they need it,” said Rodriguez. “As a former social worker, I know that often times, those who suffer from mental disorders find it difficult to voluntarily seek treatment.”

Rodriguez's bill would include National Guard and reserve troops as well as provide services to immediate family members of returning troops. Additionally, the bill would address rural health care access by allowing the VA to contract with community health care facilities so veterans wouldn't be required to travel long distances in order to reach a provider.

The additional burden of having to drive many hours to the nearest VA to seek treatment is another barrier that needs to be eliminated.

Veterans, returning troops and their immediate family members would be provided education, support, counseling, and mental health services during the three-year period following a return from deployment. Specifically, assist in readjustment to civilian life, recovery from an injury or illness incurred during such deployment; and (3) readjustment of the family following the veteran's return. This bill was passed by the House as a part of the comprehensive H.R.2874, Veterans' Health Care Improvement Act of 2007; awaits Senate consideration.

H.R.2689 (sponsor: Rodriguez TX-23) also provides the VA the authority to contract with community health centers and other qualified entities to provide services in areas not adequately served by health care facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Expert providers like community mental health centers could be able to expand the VA services to veterans in need, and provide that service closer to home.

Community mental health centers provides excellent, quality services that the federal government can take advantage of, to benefit our veterans and returning troops.

Additionally, H.R.2689 provides for peer-to-peer outreach and counseling services. The intent is to make it easier for those in need to get treatment and services.

As of mid-February more than more than 5,200 veterans who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have enrolled in the VA in South Texas.

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Congressman Rodriguez is a former social worker who currently serves on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and House Committee on Appropriations. For more information on Congressman Rodriguez visit <http://rodriguez.mail.house.gov/>